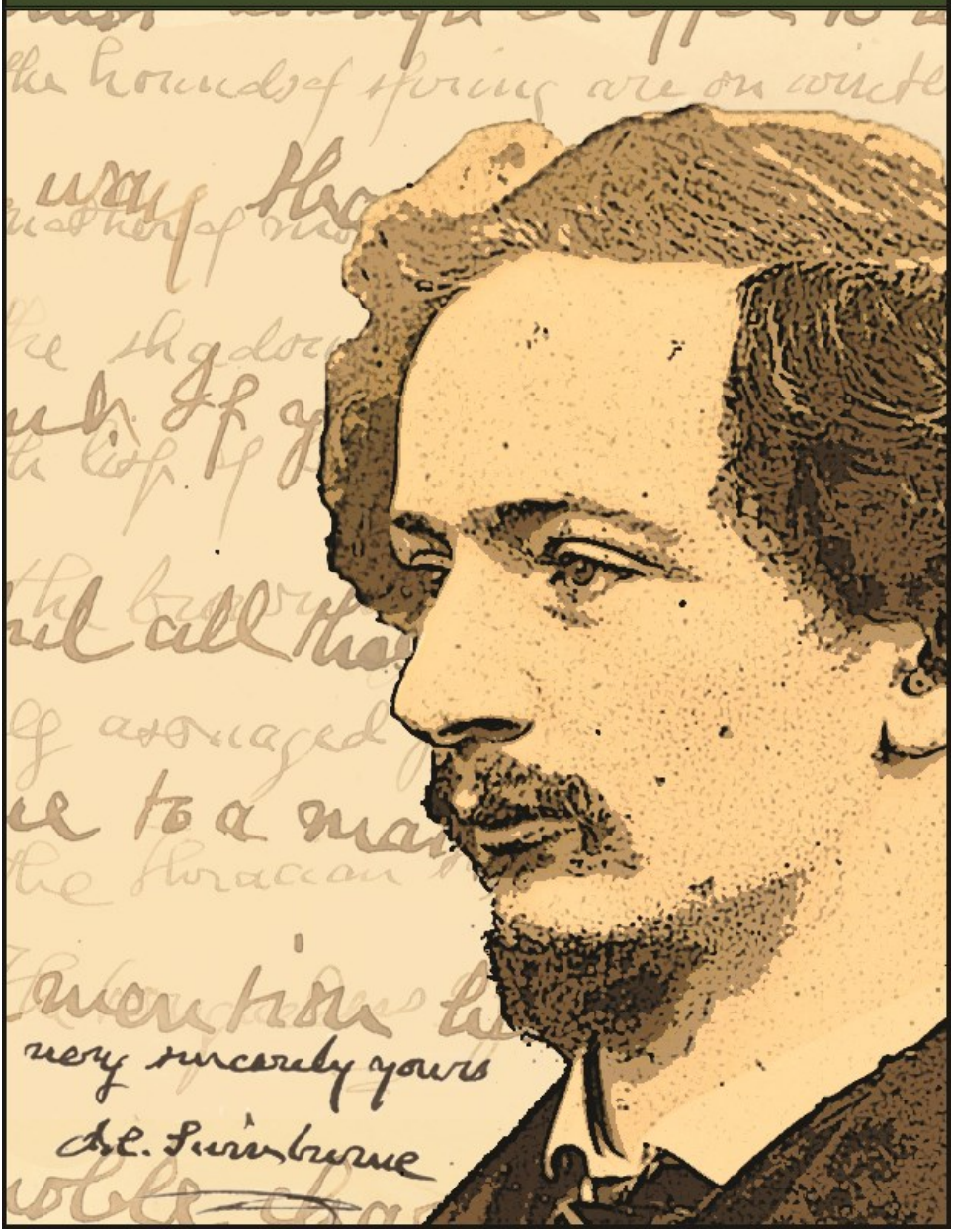
2008

Swinburne: A Radical Victorian

Beam, Kathryn L.; Khokhlov, Seymon

Swinburne: A Radical Victorian



Swinburne:
A Radical Victorian

May 19-August 22, 2008

An exhibit from curator Semyon Khokhlov

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LIBRARY
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Cover Illustration: Swinburne as a Young Man ca. 1860. A. C. Swinburne Collection.

PREFACE

No understanding of the Victorian Period is complete without recognition of the broad varieties of intellectual and social change that rumbled along beneath the prim and controlled surface commonly applied to British society of the nineteenth century. Descriptions of the period tend to ignore these disruptive voices and events, concentrating instead on statements concerning high standards of decency and morality, the growth of a comfortable middle class, pride in scientific and industrial accomplishments, and unquestioning acceptance of authority, orthodoxy, and distinctions among economic and social classes. Authors most often associated with Victorianism are Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, Arnold, Browning, and Tennyson. Not many would select Algernon Charles Swinburne as the writer most representative of the period. Yet his life span coincides almost exactly with the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. He was a major poet during these years, a prolific writer, and a personality not easily ignored by his contemporaries. So, what is the explanation? How was Swinburne both with his time and yet outside of its perceived prevailing characteristics? This exhibit suggests some answers, presenting the man and the poet in his various guises.

Guest curator Semyon Khokhlov has drawn on the large Swinburne collection in the Special Collections Library to highlight key traits of Swinburne's life and writings. The books, manuscripts, letters, and photos are primarily gifts of Lowell and Evelyn Kerr in 1935 and 1966. Lowell Kerr (University of Michigan alumnus, Lit. '23) devoted many years to enthusiastic and knowledgeable collecting, creating one of the principal Swinburne collections in the United States. For preservation purposes, in this exhibit digital re-

productions are displayed rather than the originals of the manuscripts, photos, and newspaper clippings.

The Library extends warm thanks to Mr. Khokhlov for his excellent work in analyzing Swinburne's writings and place in his society. Special thanks are also extended to conservators Leyla-Lau Lamb and Morgan Jones for help in mounting the exhibit, and to Colleen Theisen and Sarah Rentz for general assistance in all aspects of preparing this exhibit.

Kathryn L. Beam
Curator, Humanities Collections
Special Collections Library

INTRODUCTION

Algernon Charles Swinburne was born in London on April 5, 1837. His parents belonged to the aristocracy, and family wealth ensured that Swinburne could pursue the life of a man of letters, to which he had committed himself at a precociously early age, without any fear of financial instability. His idyllic childhood was spent mainly on the Isle of Wight, where he developed an enduring attachment to the sea, which often figures in his work. At the age of twelve he was sent up to Eton, where "birching" was the usual punishment for even minor infractions. This pre-sexual experience of flagellation produced, as Swinburne himself attested, a masochistic proclivity which to a great extent informed his conception of existence. While at Oxford he became a confirmed antitheist and republican and formed lasting friendships with the "Pre-Raphaelites" William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose aesthetic views were to have a great influence on his early poetry. After his expulsion from Oxford he settled in London, where he would spend the next twenty years. In this artistically fruitful period, Swinburne published such notable works as *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), which first brought him fame, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868), and *Poems & Ballads* (1866), the latter of which was greeted with general outrage due to its frank lasciviousness and obscenity. Temperamentally excitable and fervent, Swinburne was immoderate in all things, and during the London years became a wretched alcoholic. In 1879, when Swinburne was apparently dying of delirium tremens, he was persuaded to abandon his London apartment and set up a joint household in the suburb Putney with his friend Theodore Watts-Dunton. Under the supervision of Watts-Dunton, Swinburne regained his health and lived on for another thirty years. During the "Putney period" Swinburne became some-

thing of a recluse, adhering to a strict regimen of reading, writing, and walking along the downs. The most significant works from this era are *Songs of the Springtides* (1880), *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882), and *A Channel Passage and Other Poems* (1904). Swinburne died of pneumonia on April 10, 1909.

Called by Guy de Maupassant "the most extravagant artistic personality alive in the world today," Swinburne lived a passionate life, and wrote works that still amaze with their musicality, verve, and intellectual sophistication. Through letters, manuscripts, published works, and other materials this exhibit depicts Swinburne's striking personality and sets forth the nature and poetical embodiment of his radical concerns. He was combative by nature and expert at abuse, masterfully degrading his critics. A vehement antitheist, he denounced the idea of God and Christianity with bitterness and skill. He was a prophetic critic, one of the first to champion Blake and Baudelaire. In youth and middle age he was a steadfast republican – friend of Mazzini and scourge of Louis Napoleon – and a reactionary in his later years. He was a masochist who believed that existence and its constructs as well as nature itself were informed by the conjunction of pleasure and pain. Attention in this exhibit is also given to the "Putney period" of Swinburne's life, as well as to his breakthrough work *Atalanta in Calydon* and life-long attachment to the legend of Tristram and Isolde.

Semyon Khokhlov
Exhibit Curator

Case 1

Photo of East Dene, Swinburne's childhood home.
Reproduced from Mrs. Disney Leith. *The Boyhood of Algernon Charles Swinburne: Personal Recollections by his Cousin*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1917.

Photo of Swinburne as a young man, circa 1860.

George Richmond (1809-1896). "A.C. Swinburne and his sisters." Painting, undated.
Reproduced from Edmund Gosse. *The Life of Charles Algernon Swinburne*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1917.

William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919). Holograph manuscript, 1909.
Brother of the poet Christina Rossetti and the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti was an English critic and writer. In this brief yet incisive critique of Swinburne's works written at the time of the poet's death, Rossetti states that Swinburne "was naturally a rebel, an insurgent, disdainful of conventions and compromises." He opines that "the preeminent distinction of Swinburne as poet was … his astonishing lyrical flow … and daring and exhaustive mastery of the music of nature and rhythm." Of Swinburne's personality, Rossetti writes, "He was highly honorable, courageous, generous-minded, vivacious, a firm and stout friend."

Case 2

Swinburne as Critic

Swinburne was a prolific writer of literary criticism. His critical works, though mannered in style, exhibit great erudition and trenchancy. Their impressionistic aspect, which involves depicting the emotional experience of a given text, laid the foundation for the heralded aesthetic criticism of Walter Pater. Yet, arguably, his most notable quality as a critic was his ability to detect genius. Rising above his era's artistic and moral biases, Swinburne disclosed the merit of unpopular and reviled works that in years after would gain the canonical status he had envisioned for them.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Paris: Editions Nilsson, 1927.
First published in 1857, this collection was deemed by the authorities to be "an insult to public decency" and its author and publisher were prosecuted. Baudelaire's work is sensuous and iconoclastic, professing a fervent and spiritual demonology. It informed the symbolist movement and a strand of modernism, has influenced countless poets, and is regarded as one of the great works of Western literature.

Swinburne. "Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du Mal," from *Les Fleurs du Mal and Other Studies*. London: Printed for private circulation, 1913.
In this essay, first published in 1862, Swinburne calls attention to the technical brilliance of Baudelaire's poetry and artfully captures its effects: "It has the languid lurid beauty of close and threatening weather." As Philip Henderson in his biography of Swinburne writes: "It required courage to champion a volume of modern French verse in England in 1862, let alone the work of a man who had been condemned for obscenity in his own country.

Swinburne. "Ave atque Vale," from *Swinburne's Poems*, Vol. III. London: Chatto & Windus, 1904.
Written in memory of Charles Baudelaire, this elegy, whose title translates as "Hail and Farewell," is regarded as one Swinburne's finest poems. Baudelaire, though gone, is for Swinburne still present since "not death estranges / My spirit from communion of thy song."

Swinburne. *A Note on Charlotte Bronte*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1877.
In this essay Swinburne accurately predicts that Charlotte Bronte's works, in particular *Jane Eyre,* will outlive most of those that in his time enjoyed greater popularity and critical praise. In lauding Bronte, Swinburne instances the organic quality of *Jane Eyre*, arguing that the ability to create such an effect is the hallmark of genius.

Swinburne. "Emily Bronte," from *Miscellanies*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1886.
Swinburne published this essay at a time when *Wuthering Heights* was generally condemned as overly morbid. In defending and praising Bronte's masterpiece, Swinburne points to its "imaginative truth" and illuminates a central theme: "the cry for liberty." He is particularly astute in asserting that "it may be true that not many will ever take it [i.e., *Wuthering Heights*] to their heart; it is certain that those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose."

Swinburne. *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. London: John Camden Hotton, 1868.
When this lengthy essay was published Blake, who is now considered one of the great English poets, was not much read or appreciated, mainly because his work was thought to be impenetrable. Swinburne's pioneering study covers the span of Blake's artistic output, with a special focus on the difficult "prophetic books."

Though Swinburne's elucidation of Blake's work is highly subjective, the study is crucial for it initiated a reevaluation of the Romantic poet.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). ***Five Letters from Stéphane Mallarmé to Algernon Charles Swinburne*****. London: Privately Printed, 1922.**
Mallarmé was a leading French symbolist poet who profoundly influenced the Dadaist, Surrealist, and Futurist movements of the early twentieth century. Swinburne championed the work of Mallarmé early in the latter's career, and was one of the first to read his "L'après-midi d'un Faune" (The Afternoon of a Faun), a touchstone of symbolism that was the basis for Nijinsky's ballet with music by Debussy.

Swinburne. ***Letters from Algernon Charles Swinburne to Stéphane Mallarmé.*** **London: Printed for Private Circulation, 1913.**

Case 3

The Combative Swinburne

Swinburne had an irascible temperament and excelled at insult. Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), in his biography of the poet, gives a revealing anecdote:

> Swinburne was under the impression that there were only two fares for cabmen, a shilling for a short drive and eighteen pence for a long one. On one occasion a cabman, who considered himself underpaid, began to abuse [William] Morris and Swinburne, when the latter instantly replied with such a torrent of vituperation that the cabman drove off at full speed.

Swinburne's iconoclastic views and works made him a lightning rod for critics. Over the course of his life he was involved in several literary feuds, the records of which illustrate his impressive capacity for invective.

Swinburne. "Faustine," from *Laus Veneris and Other Lyrics*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 1942.
In the 1860s the poetical environment was dominated by the subdued, proper works of Alfred Lord Tennyson and his followers, which complimented the ideals of the Victorian era. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads,* which was calculated to offend, came out in 1866 and incited a firestorm of moral outrage. The poem above, "Faustine," was subjected to particularly virulent criticism.

"Swinburne's Folly." Anonymous review of *Poems and Ballads* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 August 1866.
While acknowledging Swinburne's talent, this review denounces the lasciviousness and obscenity of *Poems and Ballads*, going so far as to say "his indecency really does seem referable to disease."

Swinburne. *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. London: John Camden Hotten, 1866.
To quiet the uproar over *Poems and Ballads,* Swinburne was urged to put out an apologia. He was hesitant at first, thinking it beneath him to even acknowledge his assailants, but by degrees he came round to the idea, producing a pamphlet in which he somewhat disingenuously affirms that his works are dramatic, and adopts a tone of irritated haughtiness in addressing his detractors, whom he calls "animalcules and infusoria."

"Mr. Swinburne's Defence." Anonymous review of *Notes on Poems and Reviews* in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 November 1866.
This reviewer of Swinburne's *Notes on Poems and Reviews* expresses skepticism of Swinburne's defensive arguments, condemn-

ing him for "the delight he has in spending his imagination over little lewd and lascivious details."

Photo of Robert Buchanan (1841-1901).
Source: MySite, Robert Buchanan.

Portrait of Swinburne, adapted by "W.H. Caffyn after G. F. Watts."
Reproduced from Ernest Rhys. *Everyman Remembers.* London & Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1931. (See Case 11)

Robert Buchanan (1841-1901). *The Fleshly School of Poetry*. London: Strahan & Co., 1872.
Buchanan, a poet and critic, denounces the "sensual" and "unmanly" poetry that is allegedly undermining Victorian pieties. As Buchanan has it, "The Leg, as a disease, is subtle, secret, diabolical … the shop windows teem with Leg." The target of this work is primarily Swinburne's friend, the poet and painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). Yet Buchanan addresses Swinburne, too, stating that he "has attempted to surpass Baudelaire [Charles Baudelaire, French poet, 1821-1867], and to excel even that frightful artist in the representation of abnormal types of diseased lust and lustful disease."

Untitled and anonymous article in *The Globe*, 6 July 1872.
This brief commentary on the Swinburne-Buchanan controversy understates the obvious: Swinburne "has not a very high opinion of critics."

Swinburne. *Under the Microscope*. London: D. White, 1872.
Swinburne here drolly assumes the role of a neophyte entomologist to examine certain critics whom he likens to insignificant insects.

His greatest feats of irony and abuse are reserved for Buchanan, lame examples of whose prose Swinburne exploits throughout -- e.g., "The 'enormously fine' work of the 'tremendous creature Dante.'" Commenting on Buchanan's tendency for self-praise, Swinburne writes, "A living critic of no less note in the world of letters than himself has drawn public attention to the deep and delicate beauties of his work."

Case 4

Swinburne. "The Devil's Due." A letter in *The Examiner*, 11 December 1875.
Swinburne, under the guise of Buchanan's pseudonym, Thomas Maitland, responds here to an article in the *Examiner* which declared that the anonymous "Jonas Fischer: A Poem in Brown & White," was attributable to "either Mr. Robert Buchanan or the Devil." Swinburne qua Maitland calls Buchanan "the multifaced idyllist of the gutter," and a "polypseudonymous lyrist and libeller."

[Swinburne] "Epitaph on a Slanderer." In *The Examiner*, November 1875.
The subject of this assault is Robert Buchanan.

Photo of Frederick James Furnivall (1825-1910).
Source: Wikipedia.

Swinburne. Carte de Visite, circa 1868.

Swinburne. "Report of the First Anniversary Meeting of the Newest Shakspeare Society." In *The Examiner*, 1 April 1876.
Swinburne's long feud with Frederick James Furnivall (1825-

1910), founder of the New Shakspeare [sic] Society, began with the publication of this satirical work, written in response to criticism leveled against Swinburne's essays on Shakespeare. A fanciful and trenchant work, the "Report" accuses the Society of dogmatism and silliness. An example is this passage: "Mr. D. then brought forward a subject of singular interest and importance – 'the lameness of Shakespeare: was it moral or physical?'"

Swinburne. "The Court of Love." In *The Athenaeum*, 31 March 1877.

In this article Swinburne wryly transforms Furnivall's charge of ignorance into an absurdity. He skewers the program of the New Shakspeare Society, and calls Furnivall "the most bellicose bantam-cock that ever defied creation to a match for mortal combat on the towering crest of his own dunghill."

Furnivall. Letter in *Daily News*, 19 December 1879.

Arguing that in the proper spelling of "Shakespeare" the first 'e' must be omitted, Furnivall takes a sideswipe at Swinburne, whose name he transforms into "'Swineburne'" or pigsbrook, Anglo-Saxon 'swin' – a pig; combined with 'burne' – a brook."

Furnivall. "Mr. Swinburne's 'Flat Burglary' on Shakespeare: Two Letters from *The Spectator* of September 6th & 13th, 1879." London: Trübner and Co., 1879.

The hyperbolic title given to these two letters refers to certain mistakes Furnivall accuses Swinburne of making with regard to diction in Shakespeare. After doling out some abuse, Furnivall ends the first letter with a pointed question: "When will Mr. Swinburne learn modesty?"

Case 5

Swinburne's Politics

From an early age Swinburne was passionately committed to republican principles. At Oxford, he wrote "The Temple of Janus" in support of tyrannicide and liberty, and contributed to the student newspaper an essay excoriating the second French empire. In his rooms hung portraits of Mazzini, the great Italian patriot, and Orsini, the would-be assassin of Napoleon III, a ruler toward whom Swinburne felt a deep animosity all his life. He wrote, "We shall see Bonaparte the Bastard / Kick heels with his throat in a rope." In 1867 Swinburne met Mazzini, who enlisted him as "'his poet' in the crusade for Italian liberty." Swinburne's contribution to the cause was *Songs Before Sunrise*, a collection of poems first published in 1871 and dedicated to Mazzini.

Swinburne's "cries for liberty" were informed as much by ontological considerations as they were by political ones. In *Songs Before Sunrise* Swinburne prophesies and enacts the unification of humanity. Although an antitheist, he held that man was essentially divine, yet religious prejudice and political oppression held him in check and dissension. It was Swinburne's belief that once these restraints were eliminated man would realize his true nature and a harmonious, heavenly kingdom of man would emerge.

Swinburne. ***Ode to Mazzini; The Savior of Society; Liberty and Loyalty.*** **Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1913.**
This collection features significant political works that were not published during Swinburne's lifetime. Written when he was twenty, the "Ode to Mazzini" extols the Italian patriot for his efforts to transform Italy into a sovereign republican state. The ironically titled "The Saviour of Society" is a blistering rebuke of Louis Napoleon.

Swinburne. *Songs Before Sunrise*. Portland, Maine: T. B. Mosher, 1901.
The most socially conscious of his poetry collections, *Songs Before Sunrise* features works that set forth an idealistic republicanism and denounce political as well as religious injustice. Several poems from this collection are featured in this exhibit.

Swinburne. "Song of the Standard." Holograph manuscript, undated.
In this poem Italy is apostrophized as "Queen and republican." She is offered the Italian tri-color by the speaker, who represents those fighting for Italy's liberty. Swinburne at the close encourages Italy to "take to thy bosom the nations, and there shall the world come to rest," which prophetically implies that a free, republican Italy can inspire political and spiritual reformation on a global scale.

Swinburne. "Halt Before Rome," from *Songs Before Sunrise*. London: F. S. Ellis, 1871.
Written in 1867, this poem envisions the Italian Army preparing to seize Rome (the actual event took place three years later, bringing about, at last, the unification and liberation of Italy). Swinburne, casting himself as a soldier, encourages participants of the cause in idealistic terms: "Gifts hath not Freedom to give," he writes, "Only her [Italy's] hands on you, blessing you…Only her heart for a home."

Swinburne. "Eve of Revolution," from *Songs Before* Sunrise. London: Chatto & Windus, 1909.
In this poem Swinburne depicts the world as seething from oppression and inequity. He releases this furiously pent energy through the very poem itself, writing "I set the trumpet to my lips and blow. / The height of night is shaken, the skies break." The object of the revolution is to fight "Till change unmake things made and love remake."

Swinburne. *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic*. London: F. S. Ellis, 1870.
The French Third Republic arose after the fall of Louis Napoleon's empire. Swinburne celebrates the occasion ecstatically: "Light of the light of man, / Reborn republican, / At last, O first Republic, hailed in / heaven again!" Much of the poem's rhetoric is conveyed through personification and symbolism; France is compared to a body that has regained its soul.

Holograph letter. Swinburne to James Stansfield (1820-1898), October 1872.
In this letter Swinburne applies to Stansfield, a liberal English politician, for assistance in finding employment for the exiled and impoverished M. Andrieux. Swinburne says Andrieux had served as finance minister of the Paris Commune, the progressive government that ruled over the city for two months in 1871.

Swinburne. "Quia Multum Amavit." Holograph manuscript, circa 1870.
Contained in *Songs Before Sunrise,* this poem casts France as a harlot who has prostituted herself to Louis Napoleon. The speaker is freedom itself, informed by the godly spirit of man, who claims France as a daughter and delineates the enormous difference between its current, wretched state and its illustrious republican past.

John S. Mayfield (1904-1983). *Swinburneiana, a Gallimaufry of Bits and Pieces about Algernon Charles Swinburne.* Gaithersburg, Maryland: The Waring Press, 1974.

This book by one of the twentieth-century's principal Swinburne collectors relates anecdotes about hunting for Swinburne works and ephemera. It features on the cover an illustration by Lady Pauline Jermyn Trevelyan (1816-1866) of Swinburne addressing a crowd gathered to watch his execution, ordered by Louis Napoleon.

Swinburne. "Marching Song." Holograph manuscript, circa 1887.
This work, part of *Songs Before Sunrise*, is voiced by the fighters for liberty, who bring to those unmanned by unjust governments "the light that saves … the morning star; / Freedom's good things we bring you, whence all good things are." Swinburne portrays this quest as spiritual in nature, aimed at a radical transformation of things as they are: "Time," he writes, "foot by foot, gives back before our sheer desire."

Case 6

Swinburne the Antitheist

In a letter to the American poet and critic E. C. Stedman (1833-1908), Swinburne relates that he was "brought up a quasi-Catholic," and that in his youth he experienced "well-nigh to unaffected and unashamed ecstasies of adoration when receiving the Sacrament." His break with Christianity occurred while he was at Oxford. There, under the influence of the free-thinker John Nichol (1833-1894), Swinburne not only lost his faith but developed a profound hostility toward Christianity and God. As his works and letters attest, he held that the Christian Church was a corrupt institution that wrought social ills and exploited the suffering of Jesus. In lashing out against theism, Swinburne portrays God as the epitome of cruelty, the argument being that if God is seen as the master of the universe then he must be evil, for existence at its core is almost nothing but fleetingness and pain.

Swinburne's articulation of his anti-Christian and antitheistic views testifies to his thorough knowledge of the Bible, which he exploited in attacks that are notable for their intellectual sophistication and daring.

Photo. Old Mortality Society, undated.
As an undergraduate at Oxford, Swinburne (bottom row, second from the left) was a member of the progressive and irreligious Old Mortality Society. According to the organization's Charter, it derived its name "from the consideration that every member of the said Society was or has lately been in so weak and precarious a condition of bodily health as plainly to instance the great frailties and so to speak mortality of his own human life and constitution."

Swinburne. "The Cannibal Catechism." London: Printed for Private Circulation Only, 1913.
In his twenties, Swinburne was associated with the Cannibal Club, whose members gathered regularly to dine and air radical ideas on politics and literature. While cannibalism was, in all likelihood, not practiced, the club's official symbol was a mace in the shape of an African head gnawing on a thighbone inscribed with the words 'Ecce Homo.' "The Cannibal Catechism," which was recited by all at the beginning of each dinner, subjects the Eucharist to "demonic parody," reifying the spiritual cannibalism that is inherent in the ritual.

Holograph letter. Swinburne to the Reverend Archer Gurney (1820-1887), 21 January 1880.
Swinburne did not know of the Rev. Gurney until he received from him a fifteen-page letter containing didactic criticism of his poetry, quibbles, and a condemnation of Swinburne's hero Victor Hugo. Besides artfully disparaging the overmatched Gurney, Swinburne in his response offers a succinct explanation of his stance toward religion.

Holograph letter. Swinburne to Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1899), 26 December 1882.
Swinburne here sardonically explains to his friend Burne-Jones, a painter associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, why he has been compelled to decline Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone's offer of the archbishopric. Parodying the periphrastic style

of Gladstone and high-church rhetoricians, Swinburne produces a whimsical and mordant critique of the Anglican Church, for whose high officials, he implies, faith was an afterthought.

Swinburne. *Atalanta in Calydon*. London: Moxon & Co., 1865.
Though this play, which first brought Swinburne fame, concerns itself with a Greek myth, critics have shown that the God referred to in the pages above is clearly the Christian one. The speaker is the chorus whose diatribe obliquely presages the tragic events that are to occur. God is here called the "the supreme evil," the merciless deity that destroys hope and life.

Case 7

Swinburne. "Anactoria," from *Poems and Ballads*. London: Moxon & Co., 1866.
Like *Atalanta,* "Anactoria" is Greek in nature and yet the God described in the poem is plainly anachronistic. The speaker is Sappho, the great and tragic Greek poet, and she is addressing her unfaithful lover Anactoria. In expressing the pain of her love, Sappho talks of the cruelty of God, "the mute melancholy lust of heaven," and expresses the desire to "Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath / and mix his immortality with death."

Swinburne. "Christmas Epiphanies." Holograph manuscript, circa 1871.
This work consists of three parts, with the first constituting a devotional lyric whose message is deconstructed and criticized in parts two and three. "Outside Church," the title of the second part, contains a biting social critique of Christianity that stresses its hostility toward non-believers.

Swinburne. "Before a Crucifix," from *Songs Before Sunrise*. London: F. S. Ellis, 1871.
Structured as a dramatic monologue, "Before the Crucifix" condemns Jesus as a "desolate evangel." To convey the corruption of the Church, Swinburne portrays it as a leprous and syphilitic bride.

Swinburne. *Bothwell*. London: Chatto and Windus…, 1874.
The second play in Swinburne's trilogy on the life of Mary Stuart, *Bothwell* presents a diabolical portrait of Mary that stealthily disparages Christianity. In the highlighted lines, Lord Darnley, who is Mary's husband and will shortly be killed by her associates, relates a dream featuring his wife. The contents of this dream clearly echo the Eucharist. Swinburne, through this demonic parody, undermines what is the most sacred ritual in Christianity by linking it with death and deception.

Swinburne. "Dolores," from *Poems and Ballads*. London: John Camden Hotten, 1866.
Of all of the works in Swinburne's controversial collection *Poems and Ballads*, it was arguably this poem that aroused the greatest outrage. The Dolores of the title is the Virgin Mary who is depicted as a wanton and sadistic temptress. In the lines indicated the speaker parodies the trinity by describing his attachment to Dolores/Mary in incestuous terms.

Case 8

Swinburne the Masochist

In the addendum to his bowdlerized biography on Swinburne, Edmund Gosse (1849-1898) writes, "Swinburne said that the taste for punishment had come to him at Eton." At the time that he was enrolled students who committed even minor transgressions were

lashed with birch rods. Swinburne treasured the memory of these ritual beatings, and the masochistic drive remained central throughout his life. He exchanged with friends accounts and depictions of school-boy floggings, and for a number of years patronized a sado-masochist establishment in the London suburb of St. John's Wood.

Sadomasochistic imagery and themes are prevalent in Swinburne's works, yet the use to which he puts them indicates that he is not merely flaunting a psycho-sexual predilection. Rather, Swinburne's poetry sets forth the bold proposition that in nature, love, and the major constructs of existence, pleasure and pain are intertwined.

Swinburne. "Arthur's Flogging," from *The Whippingham Papers*. London: Printed by J. H. Gaball for E. Avery, 1888.
Written in the 1860s, the poem describes a flogging session in excruciating detail. Though it is generally blunt and crude, it does contain instances of high artistry. The flogger is likened to an ancient scribe, engraving text onto a white clay tablet, and Arthur's plight is subtly, blasphemously associated with the Passion of Christ.

Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). *The Complete Justine; Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
The notorious De Sade extolled vice and called for the abolition of morality and religion. His most famous novel, *Justine*, is marked by emphatic wickedness and sexual cruelty. Though Swinburne held that De Sade's works were artistically deficient, he was attracted by the French author's brutal vision of existence.

Swinburne. *Lesbia Brandon*. London: The Falcon Press, 1952.
Published long after Swinburne's death, this unfinished, semi-autobiographical novel explores the trials and risqué passions of a

Victorian family. The passage highlighted here expresses the torment of fervid, honest writing, the act of which is a physical, psychological, and emotional release so that "one can't tell where the pain or the pleasure ends or begins."

Swinburne. *Hymn To Proserpine*. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1944.

In Roman and Greek mythology Proserpine is the Queen of the Underworld. Swinburne in this poem strikes an invidious comparison between paganism and Christianity, whose creed he declares to be stifling: "Thou has conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath." The sadomasochistic aspect of Christian faith is emphasized in the exclamation, "O ghastly glories of saints," which alludes to the artistic tradition, originating in the medieval period, of gruesomely depicting the deaths of Christian saints.

The wood-engravings for this publication were created by John Buckland-Wright (1897-1954), an artist based in Brussels and London, and known especially for the high quality of his prints.

Swinburne. "On the Russian Persecution of the Jews," from *Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1882.

In this poem, one of the few denunciations of the Russian pogroms against the Jews at this time, the poet focuses on the sadism of Christian zealotry. The persecutors, he suggests, derive pleasure not only from doing violence to Jews but also from debasing their own God. The conjunction of passion and pain in the religious context underscores, as Dorothea Barrett writes, "man's need to profane and humiliate what he worships."

Case 9

Swinburne. *Laus Veneris*. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1948.
Based on the legend of the Christian knight Tannhauser, this poem represents Swinburne's most poignant articulation of the painful pleasure of love. Having been excommunicated for coupling with Venus, and denied absolution, Tannhauser lives out his days with his heartless love, stating: "Yea, Lord, a little bliss, / Brief bitter bliss, one hath for a great sin; nathless thou knowest how sweet a thing it is."

The illustration is a wood-engraving by John Buckland-Wright. (see Case 8)

Swinburne. "Cleopatra," from *Laus Veneris: Poems and Ballads*. Portland, Maine: T. B. Mosher, 1899.
Cleopatra in this poem is elevated to a goddess, who "sees the heart of death made bare / The raveled riddle of the skies." Like most other female figures in Swinburne's early poetry, Cleopatra is imperious and sadistic, inspiring subservient adoration that is fraught with pain: "The strong sense of her beauty stings, / Like a keen pulse of love."

Swinburne. "By the North Sea," from *Studies in Song*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1880.
In his critical essay on William Blake, Swinburne puts forward the Sadean notion that "it is by criminal things and deeds unnatural that nature works and moves and has her being." Here, "nature" is used broadly, encompassing the entire natural world. In this passage the sadistic force of the sea is passionately described.

Swinburne. *Pasiphaë: a Poem*. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1950.
In Greek mythology Poseidon bewitched the goddess Pasiphaë into falling in love with a bull, after her husband, King Minos, had reneged on sacrificing it to the sea god. Pasiphaë had Daedalus, the master craftsman, build for her a hollow wooden cow so that she could consummate her love. The Minotaur was the issue of this union. In the poem Pasiphaë's love is depicted in violent terms: it "Pricks to the bone, biting her flesh with teeth." The prospect of the union does not assuage her, for as she tells Daedalus, "My thought says healing while my tongue says hurt."

This illustration, also by John Buckland-Wright, is an engraving on copper.

Case 10

"And their four lips became one burning mouth." - *Tristram of Lyonesse*

The legend of Tristram & Isolde was for Swinburne an object of lifelong fascination. His first attempt to depict the plight of the star-crossed lovers came when he was twenty. *Queen Yseult*, six of whose projected ten cantos were completed, is heavily indebted to the poetry of Swinburne's friend William Morris (1834-1896) and reflects, as Edmund Gosse writes, "the intense study which Swinburne, at the age of twenty, was already giving to the art of verse." In the more mature fragment "Joyeuse Garde," written a few years later, Swinburne dramatizes the crucial, tense scene of the lovers hiding out at Lancelot's castle. *Tristram of Lyonesse*, which occupied Swinburne for nearly twenty years, is his final and most accomplished rendering of the legend as well as one of his greatest works.

Swinburne. "Queen Yseult." London: Private Circulation Only, 1918.

Swinburne. "Joyeuse Garde," from *A Lay of Lilies and other Poems*. London: Private Circulation Only, 1918.

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898). "The Attempted Suicide of La Belle Isoude." Stained-glass panel, 1862.
Reproduced from Debra N. Mancoff. *Burne-Jones*. San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998.
Edward Burne-Jones was an artist associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose agenda involved a close study of nature and the cultivation of the methods and the spirit of the early Italian, i.e., the "pre-Raphael," painters. This panel is part of a series created by several members of the Brotherhood depicting the legend of Tristram and Isolde.

William Morris (1834-1896). "Le Belle Iseult." Painting, 1858-1859.
Reproduced from Charlotte and Peter Fiell. *William Morris*. New York: Taschen, 1999.
A member of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an artistic circle with which Swinburne was associated, William Morris was a designer, artist, poet, social reformer, and publisher. This work was inspired by Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Swinburne. "Tristram of Lyonesse," from *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1904.

Case 11

William Hartley. Algernon Charles Swinburne. Pen and ink drawing, 1898.
This drawing was made from a photograph of the famous portrait of Swinburne by George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) owned by the National Gallery, London. William Hartley was art editor of the London *Star*, and the drawing was reproduced in the *Star* on January 16, 1899.

Case 12

Charles Hazelwood Shannon (1853-1937). *Atalanta*. Lithograph, 1893.
Charles Hazelwood Shannon was an English artist who attained considerable success with his portraits, etchings, and lithographs. This lithograph is no. 15 in the *Catalogue of Mr. Shannon's Lithographs*, which states that only fifty proofs are in existence.

Swinburne. First stanza of the first chorus of *Atalanta in Calydon*. Holograph manuscript, 12 September 1864.
The first chorus of *Atalanta* is a pagan celebration of the awakening of spring. Marked by aural euphony and lush imagery, this influential work is regarded as one of Swinburne's finest. Collector Lowell Kerr noted that these lines, written on familiar letter paper, were probably prepared for a friend.

Swinburne. *Atalanta in Calydon*. London: Moxon & Co., 1865.
The publication of this work, which tells of the tragic Greek myth of Atalanta, first brought Swinburne fame. Its impact on the literary scene and Victorian society as a whole was great indeed. Professor Mackail writes that in 1864 "The poetical atmosphere was

exhausted and heavy like that of a sultry afternoon darkening to thunder. Out of that stagnation broke, all in a moment, the blaze and crash of *Atalanta in Calydon*. It was something quite new, quite unexampled. It revealed a new language in English, a new world as it seemed in poetry."

Case 13

Swinburne in "Retirement"

Swinburne, as Edmund Gosse put it, was a drunkard. At the age of 42, when he was apparently dying of delirium tremens, Swinburne's mother and his friend, the lawyer and man-of-letters Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832-1914), decided that what the poet needed was discreet supervision, as he had proven himself incapable of living on his own. Watts-Dunton volunteered to set up house with Swinburne, and under his care the poet regained his health and, improbably, lived on for another thirty years. During the "Putney period" (the London suburb in which their house, "The Pines," was situated), Swinburne's poetical and political concerns underwent certain changes. Nature, heretofore never a central focus, is the subject of many of the later poems, as are children, for whom Swinburne developed an intense yet innocent affection. The most striking change pertained to his political views. He evolved from a passionate republican to a jingoistic imperialist. The politically conservative Watts-Dunton certainly had a hand in this, but as David Riede points out, the conversion was almost inevitable, as imperialism was more conducive than republicanism to the "unadulterated civilization" that Swinburne had always sought.

Photo of Swinburne advanced in age, undated.

Photo of Watts-Dunton during the "Putney period," undated.
Reproduced from Theodore Watts-Dunton. *Old Familiar Faces*. London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 1916.

Photo of Watts-Dunton and Swinburne at the Pines, Swinburne at the top window, undated.
Reproduced from Mollie Panter-Downes (1906-1997). *At the Pines: Swinburne and Watts-Dunton in Putney*. London: Hamilton, 1971.

Richard Le Gallienne (1866-1947). "An Afternoon with Mr. Swinburne." Holograph manuscript, circa 1889.
As a young man, the writer Richard Le Gallienne paid a visit to the Pines and wrote this enthusiastic account of his experience. Swinburne was a hero to Le Gallienne, who describes the meeting in near mystical terms: "Lunch being by this time laid and Miss Watts coming in to preside, 'go tell Mr. Swinburne,' said Mr. Watts to the maid, apparently quite unaware that he was uttering magic." Watts-Dunton edited the document in what can only be called a manipulative manner, adding flattering mentions of himself and subtly reorienting Swinburne's canon and reputation.

Coulson Kernahan. "The Attack on Swinburne," from the *Daily Chronicle*, 31 October [1917?]
This article was written in response to the journalist Clement Shorter's libelous assertion that Swinburne was beset by "premature senility in that terrible ménage at the Pines." In defending Swinburne, Kernahan writes that Shorter's allegation is demonstrably false and preposterous, suggesting that Shorter was motivated merely by personal bitterness.

Holograph letter. Swinburne to Colonel Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886), May 1880.
Written not long after Swinburne's removal to the Pines, this friendly letter relates the renewal of his health and gives a somewhat idealistic impression of his new surroundings: "Our house is in the neighborhood of such noble woodlands & moorlands that we might fancy ourselves, after a short walk, 100 miles from the nearest town."

Swinburne. "Neaptide." Holograph manuscript.
Composed in 1888 or 1889, this is one of Swinburne's notable late works, giving the lie to the notion that his poetic abilities withered at the Pines. A meditative lyric in the Romantic vein, the poem features the narrator drifting through a bleak environment in which the sea is "a corpse with the night for a bier," and "the sick sun's shadowlike light / Grows thin." Yet the poem ends on a note of courageous hope that the end of life may usher in pure, unharassed existence: "Outside of the range of time … Who knows if haply the shadow of death / May be not the light of life?"

Case 14

Swinburne in "Retirement" (See Case 13)

Swinburne. "Herse." Holograph manuscript, 22 March 1882.
During the "Putney period" Swinburne came to adore children, gushing over those he encountered in his tramps along the heath and celebrating his friends' offspring through verse. This poem, whose title means "to extol," effuses over the purity, sweetness, and overall goodness of infants. The last line is particularly touching: "O child, what news from heaven?"

Swinburne's Politics (See Case 5)

Swinburne. "Unionism and Crime." Holograph letter, 28 April 1887.
In the 1880s Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone put forward the controversial Home Rule Bill for Ireland. Swinburne regarded the cause with contempt, thus disillusioning liberals who had regarded him as one of their leading lights. In this satirical letter, signed "A Gladstonite," Swinburne slyly belittles the liberal cause by invoking the violence it brought about: "she was simply scourged with furze-branches, her hair was merely burnt off, & nothing worse than hot pitch was applied to the skin of her head."

Case 15

Swinburne. "On the Cliffs." Lexington: The King Library Press, 1980.
"On the Cliffs" was written in Swinburne's middle age, shortly before he settled at the Pines. A meditative lyric inspired by nature, it opens with dejection over the perceived proximity of death and the temporal limbo that the narrator occupies: "A barren peace too soft for love or hate / Broods on an hour too dim for night or day." Unlike Wordsworth, Swinburne can derive no ease or transcendent knowledge from reflecting upon his youth, for it was marked by bitterness still vivid: "harsh thought on thought in long bleak roll / Blown by keen gusts of memory … heap the weight up of pain." Swinburne's search for comfort in a whirlwind, to paraphrase Hopkins, compels him to generate a unique myth encompassing existence and offering redemption.

This exceptional edition of the poem is printed on a single uncut length of handmade oka paper from Japan. The frieze of bodies in free fall is by the artist John Tuska (1931-1998), who also designed the paper sculpture on the slip case.

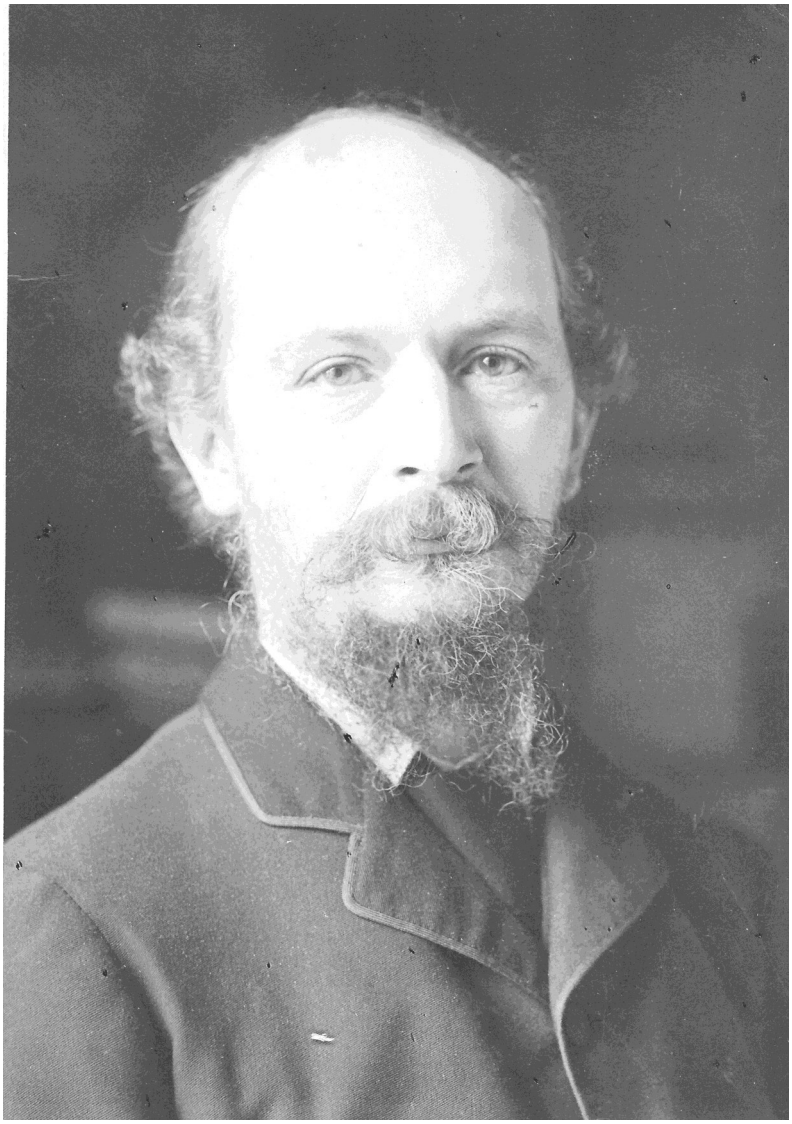


Photo of Swinburne in advanced age, undated.
A. C. Swinburne Collection

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY
7th Floor, Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1205
(734) 764-9377
special.collections@umich.edu
http://www.lib.umich.edu/spec-coll

Upcoming Exhibits and Events

1968

A Year of Protest

with Images from the Labadie Collection

Fall 2008